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HOW TO TELL
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TO

JEWISH CHILDREN

BY THE

REV. D. DE SOLA POOL, PH. D.

OF SHEARITH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE

NEW YORK CITY

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The following general suggestions for the parent or teacher may be modified according to age, sex, knowledge and intelligence of the child, and by the differing conditions of class-room instruction or individual teaching :: ::

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HOW TO TELL BIBLE STORIES TO JEWISH CHILDREN

MENTAL ATTITUDE OF TEACHER AND PUPIL.

(1) **Reverent:** All religious teaching must have an underlying spiritual basis. The teacher's attitude of reverence or its opposite will infallibly create a corresponding spirit in the child.

(2) **Jewish:** It should never be forgotten that the Bible is the basis of our Jewish religion and life; therefore for us, it is different from all other literatures, classical myths, old legends, or tales from Chaucer and Shakespeare. This difference should be made a fundamental and determining feature of the treatment of the Bible stories. They should be brought into personal connection with the child. Abraham was not some remote man, dropped from the skies in some indefinite land, among some

vague people; he was an ancestor of the child. Moses was not any vague historical man of the past, like Julius Caesar or Napoleon, but part of our family history, almost a distant relative.

(3) **National:** Abraham, Moses, and the other great Biblical characters are to be brought near to the child, not only as members of his family, but also as members of his people. In this way we can teach the child to feel the unity of his people, and imbue him with a nationalistic, patriotic, Jewish spirit. The American school child says "**We** Americans beat the British." Similarly, Jewish children should have infused into them a self-identification with their Jewish past. The teacher should not say "Was it not brave of the children of Israel . ." but "Was it not brave of us . ." The child should be made as enthusiastic over our Jewish Biblical heroes as American children are for Washington and Lincoln, or English children for Marlborough and Nelson. Only by being taught in this spirit can the child grow unconsciously into self-identification with his Biblical past.

PURPOSE OF BIBLE TEACHING.

(1) **To Make Jews:** The purpose of the Bible story is to train up good Jews, not to train for examinations or to rear Bible experts. Not the ability to pass an examination, but "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

(2) **Moral:** The story is not so much an end in itself as an illustration of a moral or religious teaching. But the moral purpose should not be stressed or made obtrusive. A child is quick to draw conclusions; therefore, praise or blame should be only suggested, and the child should be stimulated to draw the lesson for himself. Above all, there must be no cant or sanctimonious preaching. The stories should be told simply, naturally and made intelligible; then the child himself will draw the moral conclusions.

In this connection, it must be remembered that the Bible characters were not saints, but flesh and blood like ourselves. Making clear their human frailty and faultiness prevents the setting up of false standards with subsequent disillusionment. The child must see that Jacob, Saul, David, Solo-

mon, etc., were human beings, subject to the same temptations as we are, not remote. abstract saints of divine perfection. But one must guard against painting the faults in too dark colors. The bad should never be emphasized; it must be introduced incidentally. Not Jacob's sin is important, but his subsequent discipline; not David's sin is important, but the sincerity of his repentance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILD.

(1) **Imaginative:** Children are highly imaginative, and therefore they must be helped to picture the stories correctly. Remember that the Bible is: (a) ancient, and therefore it must be interpreted in terms of the modern; (b) Oriental, and therefore it must be translated into terms of the Occident; (c) representative of a simple, pastoral and agricultural civilization, and therefore the imagination of the modern town-bred child must be helped by interpretation in familiar terms of his own urban culture. The child should be helped to picture correctly, and good illustrations, plans, models, etc., should be used freely, so that the child may have a true mental picture of all elements of the Bible story, such as the Tabernacle and the Temple; an altar, a sandal, a tent, a chariot, animals such as the camel, etc.

On the other hand, one need not try too insistently to check the child's anthropomorphism. For many years it remains meaningless to a child when one tells him "God is a spirit." The child's conception of God

will purify itself automatically with added years.

(2) **Uninterested in the Abstract:** "Jealousy" is comparatively meaningless to a child, but the stories of Cain and Abel or Joseph and his brethren are vivid. "Covetousness" is an idea unmistakably interpreted by the story of Naboth's vineyard. "Friendship" is vague, but the story of Jonathan and David appeals clearly. The value of truth is best exemplified by stories such as that of Jacob; courage, by David; steadfastness by Mordecai, etc. Therefore, moral teachings should be personified wherever possible. The child is a natural hero-worshipper, and we need to stimulate this tendency Jewishly by directing it toward our Jewish heroes

(3) **Imitative:** The child when alone will be apt to play at the sacrifice of Isaac, the selling of Joseph, etc. Therefore care should be taken not to emphasize the painful, cruel and harsh.

TEACHER'S EQUIPMENT.

(1) **Sincerity:** The teacher must have faith in that which is taught. Assuming the teacher to be in a school where the spirit of the teaching is in accord with his or her views, there will be little or nothing to gloss over. It is impossible to teach that which one does not believe, without undermining the child's sincerity and shaking his faith.

(2) **Enthusiasm:** The teacher must always be subjectively interested, never indifferent, mechanical and dispassionate. Without enthusiasm the teaching will be lifeless, and will serve only to weary the child, and give him a lasting distaste for the Bible, and eventually for the religion enshrined in the Bible.

(3) **Sympathy and Patience:** It is essential to get the child's point of view, to understand the child's difficulties and to appreciate the child's interests.

(4) **The Bible:** The Bible itself must be used for accuracy and true atmosphere, and, whenever possible, the Hebrew Bible.

If an English version be used, either the Revised Version (Bagster's teacher's edition with its comprehensive Bible helps is excellent) or the Leeser translation, but not the Authorized Version of 1611, should be adopted. The teacher must always go to the original sources and avoid perpetuating class-book errors, such as that the Matsoth were baked in the sun on the backs of the children of Israel, or that the brethren of Joseph (instead of the Midianites) drew Joseph from the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites, or that Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea. The teacher, therefore, must study in advance even the most familiar lesson, to be sure of its details, to avoid pitfalls and to be able to answer unexpected questions. Text-books and other helps may also be used in preparation to straighten out chronology, or to unify a story scattered over various parts of the Bible; but they must **never** be brought into the class. It is on record that a child who had used only L. B. Abrahams' Manual of Bible history, when asked "Who wrote the Bible?" replied "Mr. Abrahams."

(5) **A Full, Almost Literal Knowledge**

of the Story: The story must never be read as a whole from a book; it must always be 'talked.' The Bible may be used for quoting exact words, but not for reading the story as a whole. The story must be made the teacher's own, or it cannot fully interest the child. It is the duty of the teacher not so much to hear lessons, as to teach them; otherwise, the hour becomes a burden to the child and not a pleasure. If one teaches the stories often enough, the child will learn them without effort.

(6) **General Biblical Knowledge:** The teacher should be at least moderately familiar with the contents of the whole Bible, and must have some acquaintance with the Apocrypha. The following are essential:

(a) A grasp of the Bible as a whole, with a knowledge of the progressive development of the people under Moses, the Judges, the monarchy and the theocracy after the exile.

(b) A general conception of the function and activity of the prophets, priests and Levites; the part played by the Tabernacle and Temple in daily life, the inner meaning

of the sacrificial system, the nature of the agricultural and pilgrim festivals, etc.

(c) A knowledge of the principal laws affecting home-life; the treatment of elders, servants, laborers, strangers, rich and poor; the laws against superstition and idolatry; regulation of military service; checks on the holding of property (how else can the story of Ahab and Naboth be made clear?), laws of tithes and charity (story of Ruth), etc.

(d) Sufficient archaeological knowledge to be able to explain the approximate modern equivalents of Biblical weights, measures and coins; the characteristics of Biblical animals and plants (how else can Jotham's parable be made intelligible?); customs such as anointing, obeisance, washing hands and feet, casting lots; Biblical articles of dress and furniture; Biblical manners and methods of ploughing, brick-making, etc.

(e) Knowledge of the main geographical and topographical features of Palestine; the chief towns, mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes; political divisions; and the political importance of the surrounding countries;

climatic conditions affecting rainfall, harvests, etc.

(f) Knowledge of the character of the peoples of ancient Palestine and the neighboring lands, and the character and significance of the various idolatrous worships with which the Jews of Bible times came into contact.

(g) Some idea of the literary history of the Bible; a recognition of the varied contents of the Bible, the difference in the characters of the various books, their varying purposes, styles and dates of composition; a conception of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry and of the Wisdom literature.

All such information may be obtained in concise form in any of the "Teachers' Helps Bibles." Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias may also be consulted. But such reference works must be used with great care. They are all written from the Christian point of view; and therefore most of them are rendered unfit for use by Jewish teachers through anti-Old Testament and pro-New Testament bias, resulting in the ac-

ceptance of radical and destructive critical theories about the Old Testament as proven facts.

METHODS OF PRESENTATION AND TEACHING.

(1) **Varied Emphasis for Boys and Girls:** For boys, one should choose more especially stories of war, victories, loyalty, bravery, patriotism, strength, trial, difficulty, etc. For girls, more weight should be laid on domestic stories, such as those of Sarah, Rebecca (who must be made the center of her marriage story, whereas for boys Eleazer should be the center of the story), Miriam, the good sister, Ruth, the good daughter, Hannah, the good mother, etc. For very young children, one should choose stories of children, e. g., Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, David, Joash, etc.

(2) **Development by Questions:** The full story should not be told entirely by the teacher. Constant use should be made of questions, so that the child himself develops the story. This method of having the child partake in the telling of the tale keeps alive the interest, and trains the child in moral thinking. Oriental imagery and the innumerable poetic metaphors of the Bible can also be explained best by the children them-

selves, with the aid of helpful suggestive questions by the teacher.

(3) **Historical and Critical Problems:** Reference to these should be omitted for all except the oldest children, i. e., from 15 or 16 years and upwards.

(4) **Theological Problems:** The child must never be confused with controversial questions such as the exact limits of inspiration, the immanence or transcendence of the Deity.

(5) **Moral Problems:** These will not exist if the warning of Section 2, page 5, be heeded. For older children, apparent difficulties must not be passed over in silence, but they should be introduced only incidentally, never being stressed. If the child should raise them, he should be stimulated to decide and judge for himself as to how the difficulties should be resolved.

(6) **Miracles:** The child has very little, if any, difficulty with miracles. For him, they are inherent in nature; and for the child rationalizing explanations of miracles are as out of place as they are usually in-

correct or absurd. But the teacher must be on his guard that he does not teach as miracles happenings which the Bible tells of as purely natural. Only a very careful reading of the Bible story, and, often, a knowledge of Hebrew, can guard against this common danger. Above all, in dealing with miracles, the fundamental truth to be made clear is that the miraculous element in the story is not the central and essential element. For instance, the greatness of Elijah rests not on his miracles, but on his heroic struggle for God against Baal.

(7) **Omissions:** That which is altogether unsuitable for children must of necessity be omitted. But it is very often possible to preserve the spirit of the story in a paraphrase, and, wherever possible, this should be done.

(8) **Science and the Bible:** At all times it must be made clear that the Bible is not meant primarily as a text-book of geology, geography, history, etc., but that its permanent value is contained in its teachings. So, for example, the importance of the first chapter of Genesis is not ultimately affected

by whether or not it agrees with, or can be made to agree with, the latest geological theories. Its ultimate value rests in its teachings of the wonder and beauty of Creation, the Divine origin of the world, man's creation in the image of God, God's providence in giving food, drink, clothing, shelter, pleasure and Sabbath rest to all—in a word, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." In general, one should never arouse doubts in the child's mind. These will come with the child's natural development. Early teaching must give the child a **positive** equipment of faith which will enable him as a youth to wrestle with doubt and win.

(9) **Chronology:** For younger children this may be neglected. The Bible is not a graduated text-book with Genesis for the lowest and Chronicles for the highest class. Free selection must be made of that which is most suitable, and Abraham and Esther may be spoken of in the same lesson. For older children, this neglect of chronology must be avoided. For them, the Bible story must be made consecutive and organic, reaching even down to our own day in un-

broken continuity. Noteworthy dates, e. g., 586 B. C. E., should be constantly impressed upon the child to help him conceive of the history in its proper sequence. But the remoteness of the past should not be emphasized; for the child, the Bible story "happened sometime before I was born."

(10) **Geography:** This should be pictorialized and visualized to the child. The coming out of Egypt, the wanderings in the desert, crossing the Jordan, the Promised Land, the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, etc., should all be locally visualized through constant reference to maps.

(11) **Prophecy:** It must be made clear to older children that prophecy does not necessarily mean foreseeing the future, but is rather inspired religious teaching on the immediate problems of the day. They must realize that the Prophets were real people, with a definite historical message and background. The prophets must be made to live for them, and not remain unattainable, saintly shadows. The burden of their social and religious teaching should be translated into modern terms.

(12) **Memorizing:** The child should memorize not such facts as the names of Cain's descendents, the camping places of the children of Israel, the names of the Cities of Refuge, the reigns of the kings, the numbers in an army, etc., but verses, teachings, laws, sayings, proverbs, promises to Israel, declarations of faith, etc. As often as possible, even the young child should learn short expressive Hebrew phrases, such as hinnéni (here am I), ayéka (where art thou?), attá haéesh (thou art the man), ve-ahabtá lere'ahhá kamóhha (and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself).

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